

# Israeli defence minister outlines postwar plan for Gaza as Blinken flies in

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📍Smoke rises over buildings following the Israeli attacks on Khan Yunis, Gaza Photograph: Anadolu/Getty Images

Yoav Gallant's proposal says Palestinians would control territory – but far-right members of Israeli cabinet have called for them to leave altogether

The Israeli defence minister, Yoav Gallant, has outlined his plan for how Gaza would be run once Hamas has been defeated, ahead of a visit by US secretary of state Antony Blinken to the region.

Gallant on Thursday unveiled the plan to the press before submitting it to prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's war cabinet, which has been divided in recent weeks over the future of Gaza after the ouster of Hamas, rulers there since 2007.

Under the plan, Israel's war in the territory would continue until it had secured the return of the hostages taken on 7 October, dismantled Hamas's "military and governing capabilities" and removed any remaining military threats.

After that, the outline says, a new phase would begin during which “Gaza will not control Gaza and will not pose a security threat to the citizens of Israel”, with unspecified Palestinian bodies assuming the territory’s governance.

Israel would reserve its right to operate inside the territory, the plan states, but there would be “no Israeli civilian presence in the Gaza Strip after the goals of the war have been achieved”.

The document issued by Gallant was titled a “vision for Phase 3” of the war. It also said the ideas were Gallant’s and not official policy, which would have to be set by Israel’s war and security cabinets.

In his plan for the next stage of the war in Gaza, he described how Israeli forces would change to an apparently scaled-down “new combat approach” in northern Gaza, while continuing to fight Hamas in the south of the territory “for as long as necessary.”

Gallant’s statement said that in the north Israeli forces would shift to a new approach that included raids, destruction of tunnels, “air and ground activities and special operations”. The aim would be “the erosion” of the remaining Hamas presence.

There was no word on whether northern Gaza’s population, which has almost entirely been driven south, would be allowed to return.

The statement did not clarify how the new approach would differ from current operations, but Gallant has previously said it would be on a lower scale.

Israel’s national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, called on Monday for Israeli settlers to return to Gaza after the war and for a “solution to encourage the emigration” of its Palestinian population. His comments echoed those by the far-right finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, who repeated his call on Sunday for Palestinian residents of Gaza to leave and make way for Israelis who could “make the desert bloom”.

The calls drew condemnation from Arab states, as well as from key Israeli ally the US.

“Gaza residents are Palestinian, therefore Palestinian bodies will be in charge, with the condition that there will be no hostile actions or threats against the State of Israel,” Gallant’s outline says, without specifying which organisations that might include.

Washington has suggested Gaza be governed by a “revitalised” Palestinian Authority, which is based in the occupied West Bank.

The issue of Gaza’s future governance is likely to be on the agenda for Blinken this weekend as he holds talks in Israel and other countries in the region. He is also expected to press for more aid for Gaza and attempt to stave off any regional escalation.

The US has also been pushing Israel to shift to lower-intensity military operations in Gaza that more precisely target Hamas, after nearly three devastating months of bombardment and ground assaults.

Netanyahu himself has talked little about Gaza's future and last week was reported to have refused requests from security officials to make plans for control of the territory after the war with Hamas ends.

Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed more than 22,400 people, more than two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Hamas-run health ministry in the territory, with thousands more thought to be buried under rubble and tens of thousands wounded.

Israel vowed to destroy Hamas after its 7 October attack in which militants killed about 1,200 people and abducted about 240 others.

Much of northern Gaza, which troops invaded two months ago, has been flattened. About 85% of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been driven from their homes and squeezed into ever smaller areas.

Israel's siege of the territory has caused a humanitarian crisis, with a quarter of the population starving because not enough supplies are entering, according to the UN.

Airstrikes and shelling across Gaza have continued to destroy houses, burying families taking shelter inside. An Israeli strike on Thursday flattened a home in Mawasi, a small rural strip on Gaza's southern coastline that Israel's military had declared a safe zone.

The blast killed at least 12 people, Palestinian hospital officials said. The dead included a man and his wife, seven of their children and three other children ranging in age from five to 14, according to a list of the dead who arrived at Nasser hospital in nearby Khan Younis.

There was no immediate response from Israel's military.

The unveiling of Gallant's plan also comes as Israel prepares to defend itself at the international court of justice in The Hague next week after South Africa accused it of committing genocide in its campaign against Hamas in Gaza.

*Agence France-Presse, Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report*